

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA MEMO

To: City Council

Thru: Yolanda Field, Dir. Community Services; Jeremy Pate, Dir. Community Development

From: Justine Middleton, Animal Services Superintendent

Date: October 25, 2011

Subject: Approval of proposed changes to the pet licensing and shelter impoundment fee ordinances

PROPOSAL:

The Animal Services Advisory Board recommended that the possibility of mandatory microchipping, as opposed to the current city licensing program, be explored for the city of Fayetteville. The benefits of microchipping are extensive. If an animal control officer finds a stray animal, he/she will scan the animal. If the animal is chipped, the officer is able to immediately have the name, address, and phone number(s) of the owner and often an emergency contact is listed as well. Being able to get the animal home directly, without ever having to come to the Shelter, reduces the workload of the staff and also is much less stressful for the pet. It also reduces the cost to the City by bypassing the need to vaccinate the animal upon intake and care for and feed the pet until the owner is able to come claim the pet. So far in 2011, we have been able to return 164 more pets to their owners than we did at this time last year. This is at least partly due to the increase in use of microchipping.

Both staff and board members spent considerable time looking at data concerning the effectiveness and the compliance rate with mandatory chipping. It was determined that more citizens already have their pets chipped than have them current on their city licenses in Fayetteville. In addition, microchips cannot be lost or misplaced like collars and tags.

The proposed ordinance changes were modeled partly on the city of Springdale's successful mandatory chipping ordinance and partly on other similar cities as well as what staff felt like would work best for Fayetteville. In addition to switching to mandatory microchipping, there are proposed changes to the animal redemption fees. These changes will help to target the animals that are the biggest concern for animal control, which are pets that are out running loose in the streets. The Shelter takes in between 4,500 and 5,000 pets each year and although many are returned to their owners or adopted, not all of them are. We want to encourage city residents to follow the leash law and keep their pets safe.

The ordinance requires that the information stored on the microchip be kept up to date both with the City and with the microchip company. In order to register a microchip with the City, a citizen will be required to fill out a simple one page form which requests the same basic information that is stored by the microchip company at the national level (name, contact information, breed of animal, etc). There are two main reasons for keeping the

information at the City level as well as the national level. One, in case a microchip company was ever to stop operating the City would still have all the required information in their software system. In addition, having the information stored in the Shelter's software system allows staff to easily access the information and get the pet home in a more timely manner. It can take several minutes to place a call to a microchip company and relay information to them so they will release the owner's information to staff. Currently Animal Control Officers do not carry City issued cell phones with them, so having the information stored in our own system will also prevent that added cost.

Although there may be an initial increased workload for staff to get the newly registered microchips in the system, the workload should drop off steeply after the first rush. The information, once entered, is good for the life of the pet unless someone moves or changes phone numbers. These updates are very simple to do in our system. Updating information with a microchip company is also a simple process that can be done online or over the phone depending on what company issues the chip. The chip the Shelter uses is 24 Hour Petwatch which allows you to update the information stored on the chip at no cost online.

There is a higher charge for the first impoundment with a chip that does not have up to date information. A chip is only as good as the information stored on it. If the address or phone number is incorrect, staff time must be spent trying alternative ways to track down the owner and those efforts are not always successful.

The current city licensing ordinance provides citizens a strong incentive to have their pets spayed or neutered. A city tag for a neutered pet is only \$5 whereas a tag for an unneutered pet is \$75—this is a yearly expense. Because microchips can be installed at any vet clinic, it does not make sense for the ordinance requiring microchipping to have any price discrepancy based on whether the pet has been neutered. Instead, staff and the Advisory Board felt it made more sense to target those incentives towards the pets that were really causing issues—those which are found running loose. This is the reasoning behind changing the redemption fee schedule. Those citizens who have pets that are found running loose are charged higher fees on the first impoundment, but with the option to have the fees drastically reduced if they choose to have their pet neutered at a reduced cost (currently \$30). If they do not choose to have their pet neutered, they may pay the higher fee. On the second impoundment, neutering will be mandatory. Any subsequent impoundments will be subject to the lower fees for neutered pets.

It is very important to remember that we only have three animal control officers for a city of over 75,000 people. If we catch a pet running loose multiple times, it only stands to reason that there are many other times that the pet is out loose when we are not there. We are still dealing with a pet overpopulation issue. Despite our best efforts, we still euthanize approximately 30% to 40% of the pets that come through our doors every year. We also take several calls daily about pets that have been hit by cars on our busy streets. It is important for pet owners to take responsibility for their pets.

Unless it is a habitual problem, every effort will be made to return the pet to the owner without the pet ever even entering our Shelter. The redemption fees are set up as a strong deterrent for those pet owners who are constantly letting their pets run loose.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff, the Animal Services Advisory Board, and the Ordinance Review Committee recommends approval of the proposed changes to the above mentioned ordinances to go into effect on January 1, 2012.

BUDGET IMPACT:

N/a